

TESTIMONY OF MR. EDWARD CRAMER

Thank you for inviting me to testify at today's hearing before the Subcommittee on Fisheries and Oceans.

With me today is Anne Fetherman, President of the Friends of Cherry Valley, a grass-roots organization formed with the interests of protecting and preserving the extraordinary Cherry Valley area that is the subject of this hearing.

Cherry Valley is located within one-half mile of Interstate 80 in Monroe County, the second-fastest-growing county in terms of population in Pennsylvania for the last two decades. The Cherry Valley area, with its unique character, vital natural resources, and habitat for rare and endangered species, has remained relatively unchanged over the years due to the remarkable stewardship of its residents who, long ago, recognized the uncommon value of the area.

Here is a little history of what has happened in Monroe County in the last ten years: In 1996, the framework was started for a new County Comprehensive Plan called the Monroe 2020 process. In 1998, Monroe County voters approved a \$25 million dollar bond for the preservation of open space. In 2001, a County Open Space and Recreation Plan was adopted that was recognized as one of the first in the state of Pennsylvania. This was the impetus for, and eventual adoption of, a Regional Open Space and Recreation Plan, consisting of the municipalities of East Stroudsburg, Stroudsburg, and Stroud Township, which was adopted in 2002.

In 2001, the voters of Stroud Township, by referendum vote in the General Election, approved a 1/4% Earned Income Tax for the preservation of open space, as well. This 1/4% Earned Income Tax provides Stroud Township with \$600,000 annually for the acquisition of open space, either as conservation easements, or outright fee simple purchases.

One of the targeted areas of the regional plan for open space preservation was Cherry Valley because of its many special characteristics.

Currently, approximately 25% of the land located within Cherry Valley has been protected by individual organizations or partnerships between public and non-profit groups. Stroud Township, Monroe County, the Pocono Heritage Lands Trust, The Nature Conservancy, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Pennsylvania State Department of Agriculture, as single entities or in partnerships, have acquired land either in fee simple acquisition and/or agricultural preservation and conservation easements. As an example, on April 28, 2006, Stroud Township acquired 45 acres bordering the Appalachian Trail and within the proposed protected Cherry Valley area in partnership with Monroe County and the Appalachian Trails Conservancy, each contributing one-third of the acquisition cost.

One of the most important things we have to keep in mind is that, in an area with a rapidly-growing population, "green infrastructure" is every bit as important as highway, water, and sewage infrastructure. It is the green infrastructure that initially attracts people to our area and, therefore, should be considered a vital economic resource to be protected.

I urge the Subcommittee on Fisheries and Oceans to support Congressman Kanjorski's bill, HR 5232, the Cherry Valley National Wildlife Study Act, to direct the Secretary of the Interior to initiate and complete an evaluation of lands and waters located in Northeastern Pennsylvania for their potential acquisition and inclusion in a future Cherry Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

If Cherry Valley becomes a National Wildlife Refuge, my vision for the future would be that of a refuge created by a new and unique partnership between private landowners, non-profit groups, local government, State agencies, and the Federal government - combining the best efforts of all involved to preserve this unique area of Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Thank you.